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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000273

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER PLEDGES FULL SUPPORT TO
GOVERNMENT'S NEGOTIATION EFFORTS

REF: 04 NICOSIA 792

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Schlicher, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: New Cypriot President Demetris Christofias could count on DISY supporting his Cyprus reunification strategy "as long he shoots straight and doesn't play games with us," DISY leader Nikos Anastassiades told the Ambassador April 22. Being in opposition did not mean opposing every government initiative in hopes of scoring political points, Anastassiades explained, especially regarding the national problem. Besides, Christofias had shown his determination to find a solution via his appointment of serious, moderate leaders to the working groups and technical committees now conducting exploratory discussions. To provide the President political cover in fending off Cyprus's still-strong nationalists, it was vital the talks bear early fruit. DISY aimed to improve the bi-communal political climate by strengthening its links to CTP and other Turkish Cypriot parties, and Anastassiades hoped to host T/C leader Mehmet Ali Talat in his Limassol home in May. Turkey's current political leadership was not inherently opposed to a Cyprus deal, Anastassiades believed, a position at odds with most G/C pundits. Despite the Greek Cypriots' best efforts, however, the DISY chieftain was certain that any deal emerging would prove less favorable to G/C interests than the 2004 Annan Plan, for which former President Tassos Papadopoulos -- the DISY leader's archenemy -- deserved blame. END SUMMARY.

A New Kind of Opposition

12. (C) Anastassiades showed no signs of disappointment over favored candidate Ioannis Kasoulides February 24 loss and DISY re-relegation to opposition status. Rather, throughout the meeting he displayed the same go-it-alone-if-need-be political gumption that often has brought short-term defeats but also grudging respect for his courage. He began by praising Demetris Christofias's early performance as President. "Christofias made huge mistakes in the past," Anastassiades argued, "especially in his support of Papadopoulos and abandonment of the Annan Plan in 2004." Yet the AKEL leader seemingly had learned from his errors and appeared determined to reach a settlement. Early proof lay in the opening of a Buffer Zone crossing at Ledra Street in the heart of old Nicosia, an action that carried significant political risk had it gone bad.

13. (C) The Cyprus issue should transcend party politics, Anastassiades maintained. As such, DISY intended to exercise constructive opposition and give the President ample maneuvering room, even if that meant foregoing opportunities

to garner short-term political wins. "Christofias (as AKEL leader) took a different approach in 2004, and see where that got us," Anastassiades lamented. DISY would play a different game, as long as the President and AKEL did not abuse the kid-glove treatment. He would tell Christofias to think like a statesman, not a politician, keeping his eyes on the long-term prize: a reunified, federal, and functional Cypriot state.

Latest Developments Give Rise to Guarded Optimism

¶4. (C) Reaching said outcome entailed hard work, sacrifice, and compromise, Anastassiades agreed. But rather than focusing on barriers to a solution and the sides' divergent positions on core issues -- themes which dominate much political discourse and most mainstream media of late -- the DISY leader spoke more optimistically. Christofias's appointments to the technical committees and working groups should have shown Turkish Cypriots "that he meant business," for example. The list was short on ideologues and long on experience and moderation, Anastassiades declared, and even included personalities with clear DISY leanings. It was vital the experts engage their T/C counterparts fully and deliver early progress, Anastassiades thought, allowing Christofias to withstand go-slow calls from nationalist naysayers and eventually call for full-fledged negotiations. Should they commence in June, as the UN-brokered March 21 agreement stipulated, it was plausible that the sides could reach a deal by the end of 2008, Anastassiades ventured.

¶5. (C) Conventional wisdom here alleges that Turkey's latest bout of political instability stemming from the judiciary's

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attempt to ban AKP and leaders Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gul bodes poorly for progress in Cyprus. Anastassiades offered a different take. In South Africa recently for an international meeting of parliamentarians, the DISY leader had engaged AKP counterparts and heard that Erdogan was "serious" on Cyprus and determined to take on the military. Anastassiades clearly was impressed with the Turkish prime minister. "This man has brought Turkey closer to Europe than any of the secularists. And they're calling him an Islamist?" He was less rosy toward Gul, however, citing the Turkish president's comments last autumn acknowledging the presence of two religions on the island. The Cyprus Problem as an inter-ethnic conflict was a tough enough nut, Anastassiades reasoned; adding a heretofore unmentioned Christianity-Islam element to it seemed disastrous.

¶6. (C) Anastassiades saw great benefit in increased cross-Green Line outreach. DISY intended to buttress its ties to the CTP and other T/C parties via a series of upcoming meetings, seminars, and social events. He was clearly pleased by his well-received stroll into north Nicosia via the Ledra passage, and envisioned other high-profile encounters with Turkish Cypriot leaders. Regrettably, T/C leader Talat had had to cancel his April 30 visit to Anastassiades's Limassol home for dinner; they hoped to reschedule for late May (Note: a Talat confidant told us April 29 that Talat would come south on May 7.) Anastassiades also claimed that Turkish- and Greek Cypriot authorities, spurred in part by DISY, were inching closer to a deal to restore the Apostolos Andreas monastery on the remote Karpass Peninsula in the T/C-administered area, Christian Cyprus's holiest site.

Always Ready to Bash the Enemy

¶7. (C) Greek Cypriots voting NO in the 2004 Annan Plan referendum believed -- or were led to believe, Anastassiades avows -- that a better deal surely awaited. The DISY leader

argued the opposite was true. He was certain that any deal emerging from the latest settlement effort would prove less favorable to Greek Cypriot interests than Annan, an outcome he laid squarely at Tassos Papadopoulos's feet. "He was stupid beyond belief not to negotiate that plan in good faith," Anastassiades decried, his voice colored by anger. The intervening four years had seen the Turkish Cypriot community developing economically and winning the battle for international public opinion. G/Cs who believed the other side would come to the table eager for a solution and offering compromise after compromise were dead wrong, he asserted. Rather, they would seek concessions. Thankfully, Papadopoulos was out of the picture, and Anastassiades took great pride in contributing to his February 24 electoral defeat. "The 'ethnarch' is dead," he contended, and historians would laud his efforts to bury him.

18. (C) Renegotiating the basis of a Cyprus solution thereby seemed contradictory to Greek Cypriot goals. Anastassiades actually favored retabling the Annan Plan and aiming for changes designed to assuage G/C concerns over Turkish-T/C non-implementation. At the tactical level, he thought the negotiators ought first to seek areas of commonality in order to build confidence and the climate necessary for compromise on the harder, core issues, such as security and guarantees, property, and governance.

Comment

19. (C) Of active Greek Cypriot political leaders, Nikos Anastassiades is consistently the most courageous and forward-thinking. We are therefore heartened to hear that Christofias's February win and DISY's relegation again to opposition status have not left him bitter and bent on political revenge. The party's pledge of CyProb support to Christofias allows the President flexibility in staking out reasonable negotiating positions and accepting compromises that are bound to spawn protests from Papadopoulos and his nationalist G/C allies, a positive development. We're less certain Anastassiades is thinking rightly over the "labelling game" of the Annan Plan, however. While it may in fact contain the best basis for a deal advantageous to G/C interests (and Reftel indicates that Christofias shared this opinion in the period after the referendum), no Greek Cypriot politician could withstand the political firestorm its retabling per se undoubtedly would stoke. Further, should

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Anastassiades mention it publicly -- or even privately, only to see it later leaked -- the subsequent condemnation might marginalize the talented politician at a crucial time. We think he is better served by lobbying for inclusion of Annan elements, but not the Plan and its terminology, into the negotiators' in-baskets.
SCHLICHER